# Provision for Playspaces

Aruna Thakkar

# DEFINING A PLAYSPACE

Eriksen (1965) defines Playspace as an (outdoor) Learning environment designed to support and suggest activities that are an essential part of the child's learning and development (social, emotional, cognitive and physical).

Natural elements like trees and shrubs and mounds and water with its adjunct animal life, are increasingly absent especially in the urban overcrowded areas.

Play areas like backyards, vacant lots, garages, if existing often collect a lot of unwanted garbage. Since children do play everywhere it is in the entrance of the homes, corridors pavements and streets that children are found to be playing.

The need for mobility is curbed by a high density of traffic. Bylanes and Streets are popular playing areas.

Schools are usually situated in the midst of communities and often have some form of space like courtyards, terraces, small playspaces and even some playgrounds. There is easy access from home to school for the children within the community. Keeping in mind the needs of the community, can a better provision for playwork be initiated with the active participation of the children and the involvement of the adults?

An Example — **Unnat Nagar Municipal Primary School, Goregaon.**

The Unnat Nagar Primary School is one of 1320 Municipal Primary Schools in Greater Bombay — The network provides for nearly 7 lakh children and three different language mediums. Keeping in mind the social needs of the community, and the knowledge that a very large percentage of children in these schools are first generation learners, where parental help or a supportive educational environment in the home is difficult; the Corporation adopts an equalitarian policy in expansion and universalization of primary education.

The problems of most slum primaries like Unnat Nagar have been overcrowded classrooms, the need for a cleaner well maintained environment, and a certain amount of 'vandalism by older children from outside.

**Overcrowding**

The school faces an inadequacy of classroom spaces, due to a very large number of children and yet there are many outdoor spaces which could be utilized. e.g. a very large courtyard, three large terraces, a back yard, two side areas and a very large PLAYGROUND that is walled in, and has a number of trees.

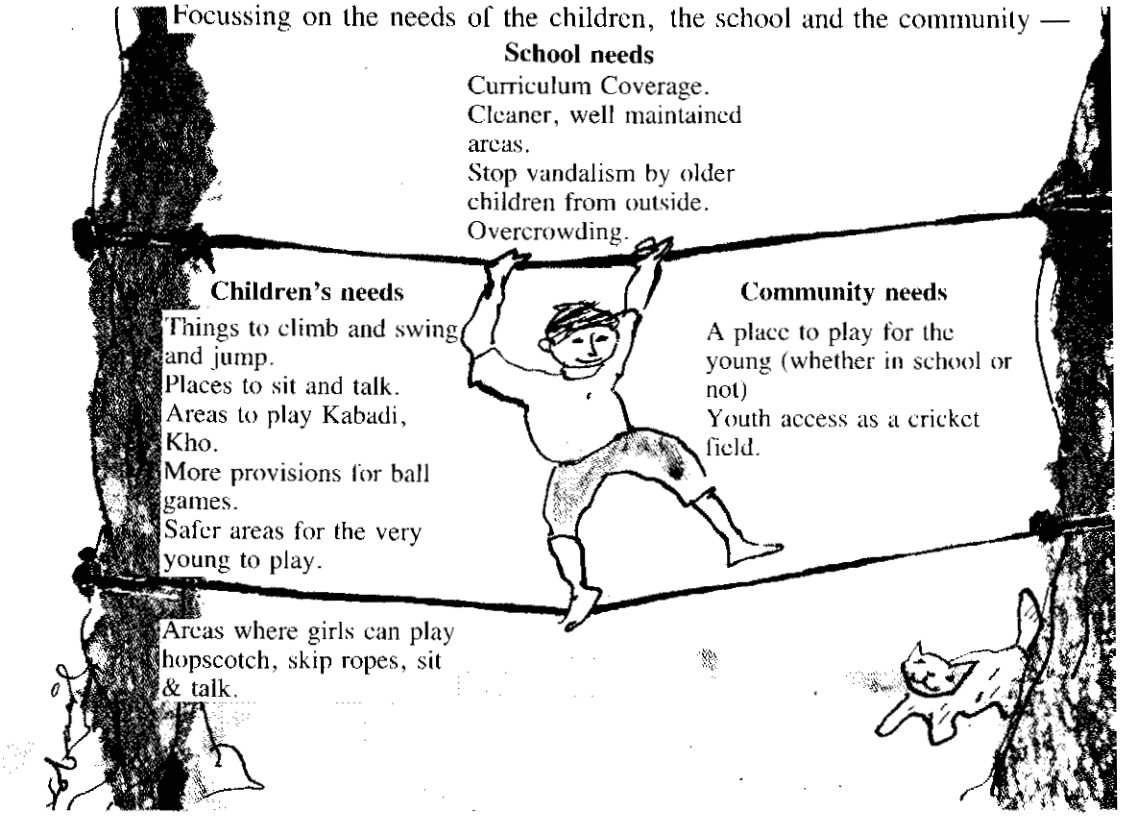
Can the spaces be utilized to support the needs of the children and teachers?

Can we utilize the outerspaces to reduce congestion, noise level, and provide access to many more activities?

**Curriculum Coverage** We know that a child learns from his environment, therefore it cannot be that the learning process occurs only within the classroom. Learning outside the classroom has sometimes been termed 'extra curricular' or not directly connected with the curriculum on hand. Can links be made with the classroom learning and outdoor learning experiences?

**A well-maintained clean environment**

Social behaviour strengthens with re-




sponsibility. Constructing, maintaining, utilizing provides certain satisfactions. Children's responsible involvement in the effort with a group of committed adults would achieve results. A constructive social attitude is the goal of all education.

**Vandalism and destruction** — Playspaces within a community are for the community just as the school is. A genuine involvement and real participation in developing and sharing the resources in the community and neighbourhood would help obtain more constructive results.

*"I cannot say that even P.E. has any playful aspect because I feel that it needs to be stressed that play is not standing in rows and doing exercises to cadence, or running areas that the teacher has set up who will run against whom — play is spontaneous and comes from the child" — Jimi Jolley.*

**Needs of the Children**

Children's Needs clearly specify more alternatives and choice.

What are the play patterns of different ages and sexes on the playground? How much time to play do they have? What choice have they experienced?

— **The need for mobility:** Provision for running games, tag, hide and seek, hopping and catching. These games are popular with the younger children in the primary school. A desire for climbing things, and swinging and sliding was expressed.

Physiological aspects of development at various levels need to be provided for; these promote gross motor skills which are at different stages of development especially with the very young, and therefore a safe, well planned provision providing various choices would promote physical development. Play is a part of the process by which children develop some of the motor-skills neces-

sary for intellectual development.

— The older groups who have the capacity for more organized play and team games needed areas for 'Kho', and 'Kabaddi', for more ball games. An open area for ball playing was clearly paramount with the older groups within school.

— Provision for the young ones where they feel safe from the more boisterous areas and closer to adult supervision.

— Areas where girls can skip, play hopscotch and other hopping games, can sit and talk,also need consideration.

Children need areas promoting social interaction and rest areas, places to sit. Play environment provision where children find a variety of challenges suitable to their ages. Their participation in the effort will guide further understandings.

**Needs of the community**

The communities around Municipal primaries are often living in severely cramped spaces, and a place to play for the young is doubly necessary.

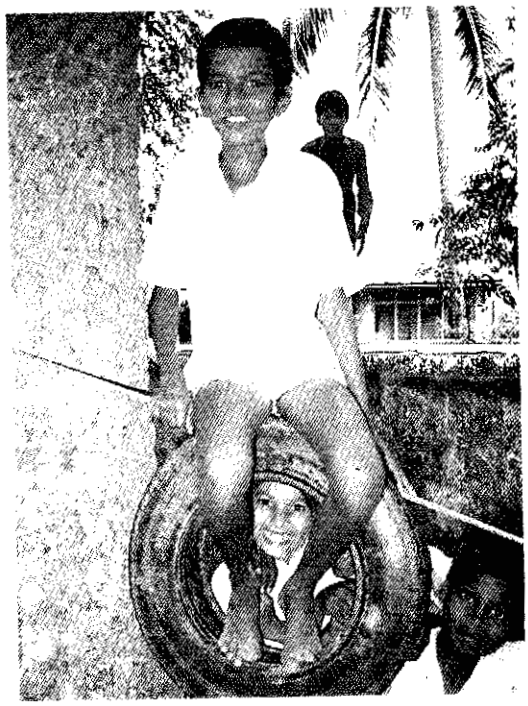
A lack of basic amenities and having often moved into cities from rural uncrowded environments the daily living patterns are not geared to the new life styles for garbage and waste disposal, water and sanitation environments. The onus on the school is even greater to provide for growth and regeneration, construction and maintenance, and aesthetics to enrich and support children's learning and development.

Children within easy access to a playspace whether in school or not,are most likely to be attracted. A desire to be involved is certain. Can constructive and mutually satisfactory places for involvement be made between the school and the community — e.g. use in after school hours, a sharing of certain responsibilities of maintenance, an option to be involved in special events occuring on the playspaces?

PROVISION FOR PLAY in housing areas, on streets, public playgrounds, in fact, development of areas for children will have to keep in mind the family and community as a whole and should therefore not be considered in isolation.

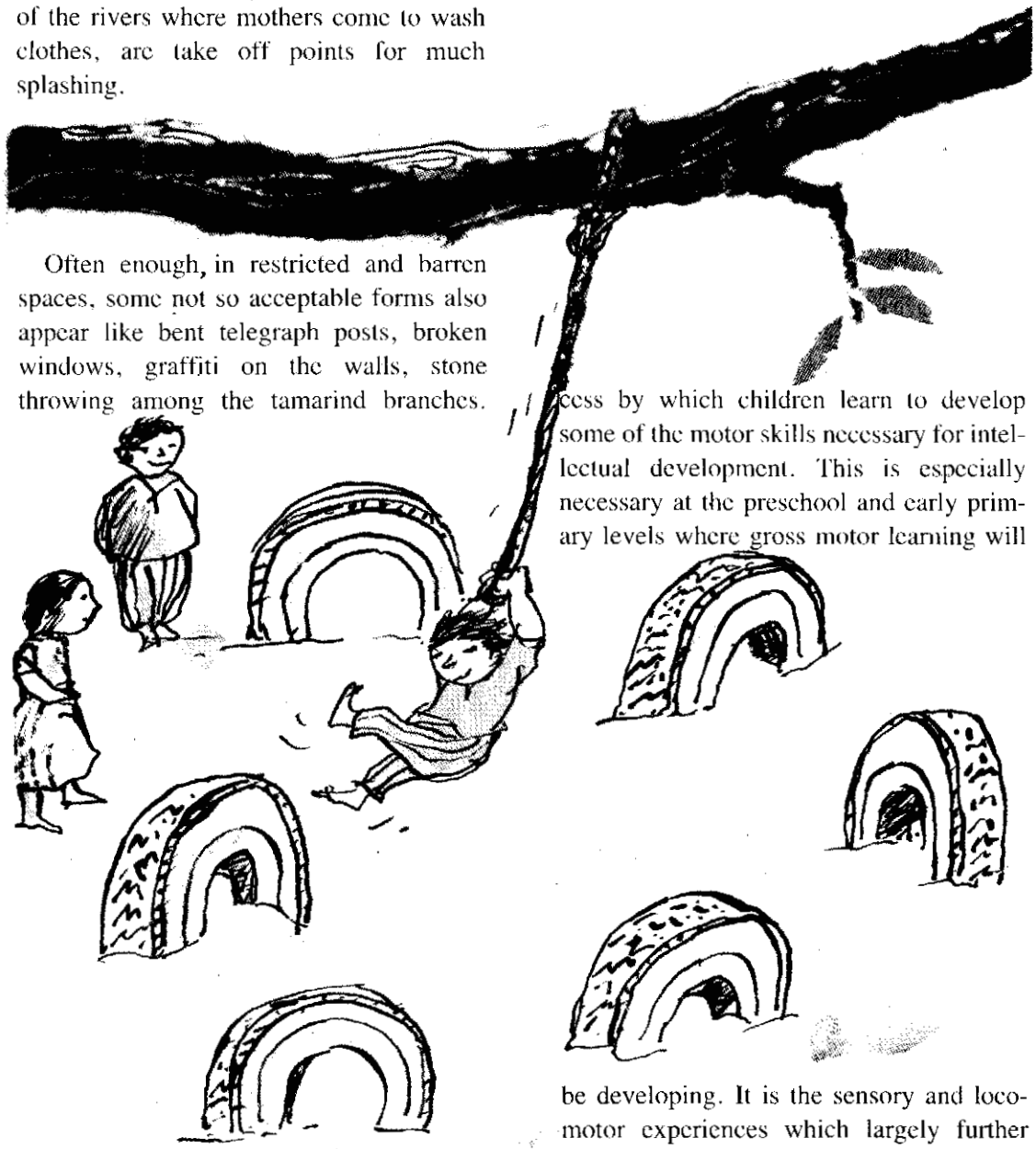
# PLANNING OF PLAY-SPACES

Play activities take place wherever children are. Therefore planning for children's needs be envisaged in a much wider context rather than on Playgrounds alone. Not only in schools and housing areas does this need arise but in most areas connected with children. e.g. children's hospitals, Paediatrician's waiting rooms, in the midst of a shopping complex, on a street corner, etc..



Children often find some play areas — whether these are designated as such or not — a parking area, a small backyard, often a corridor under a staircase, or even the middle of a street is where children have found a place to play — a lot of incidental play activity occurs like balancing on a wall, jumping up and down a flight of steps, rolling down a bank, splashing in puddles. In the outskirts of towns and in villages

children's favourite places are often the overhang from the bunyan trees — for swinging and climbing. The shallow banks of the rivers where mothers come to wash clothes, are take off points for much splashing.



Often enough, in restricted and barren spaces, some not so acceptable forms also appear like bent telegraph posts, broken windows, graffiti on the walls, stone throwing among the tamarind branches.

Much of this could be attributed to inadequate opportunities for more relevant and challenging involvement. Children's participation in their environments is minimal, though their ability and need to do so is great

Restricted and unstimulating environments, apathy, often too much adult interruption and injuction lead to short attention spans and an inability to function creatively. Overcrowded classrooms, restricted mobility for long hours, high levels of noise and an uninteractive curriculum may not be supporting the learning process.

Physiologically play is a part of the process by which children learn to develop some of the motor skills necessary for intellectual development. This is especially necessary at the preschool and early primary levels where gross motor learning will be developing. It is the sensory and locomotor experiences which largely further understandings in the earlier years.

In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it, it is the provision of stimulating alternatives and the suitability of challenge that extends creative play. Problem-solving endeavour and creative thinking is definitely enhanced by the provision of materials with alternative usage. It is not only the development of gross motor skills, but the coordination of

mind, and limits of the decision and judgement and initiative exercised that has a major stimulus in development. Play provides a balance between individual development and social interaction. Besides physical and cognitive goals, planning for playspaces makes a strong commitment towards socially positive behaviour. This would extend to more co-operation, an increased self-confidence and the joy of achievement.

Provision for natural elements, like trees, plants, insects, animals and a certain sharing of responsibility for such an environment promotes constructive attitudes. A reduction in acts of vandalism and destruction, and an easier social interaction. Emotional and social factors find satisfying avenues in the form of interaction with the physical and natural elements and the presence of other children and adults.

Junk playgrounds construction, adventure playgrounds easily provide relevant challenges and satisfactions, and learning and playing with the support of caring adults.

Though play activities take place wherever children are, their limited range of mobility promotes most use of the environments in and around the home. Within the local authority structure a clearly defined policy on allocation and effective use of resources needs must be designated to comprehensively co-ordinate children's play and education. Planning standards in urban development have been laid down for large cities in the CIDCO plan for New Bombay and the Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay Plan of 1964 has revised recommendations which suggest half acre per 1000 population in form of parks and playgrounds in the island city

The Education Department brings in a substantial amount of land within the community — moreover the local primary school occupies a central position in the neighbourhood providing easy access and involvement. It seems natural that provision should begin where the children are — Experiments in play and learning — like the development and construction of junk playgrounds that grow and change with the needs of the children; development of natural areas like sand, water planting, growing, landscaping all form educational projects and provide experiences in planning, construction maintenance, and usage.

The inputs of indigenous games, theatre, puppets and art and craft resources would provoke constant change and enliven the learning of most subjects in the curriculum. It would build an open-ended environment where more and more creative experiments and work would enhance the quality of learning and teaching. Children and teachers together would grow in confidence about the ability they gain to change their environments.

One of the most relevant factors in planning within Indian conditions is not only the quality of play provision but the quantity of it also. Wherever the numbers are far larger than the provision, alternatives in the neighbourhood, staggering hours of play, a number of small play spaces spread over will have to be considered. Careful organization between the physical provision, materials, and social provision like the involvement and planning by playleaders will be needed to provide for larger number.

It is with the involvement of the community, neighbourhood and its children that playspaces can develop and grow.

An Example: **Playground at Unnat Nagar Municipal Primary School, Goregaon**

PLANNING OF A PLAYSPACE depends on the needs of the children for whom the provision is planned. The area specific location of the playspace, its natural characteristics, its surroundings and accessibility, exposure to weather conditions, and safety factors will have to be considered. The amount of adult responsibility and involvement, provisions for care and maintenance and the possibilities for change would also affect planning.

**Natural Playspaces:** Provision of natural resources like boulders, trees, mounds, walls, planted areas, landscaping can be maintained and utilized within the design. e.g. a mound forms a natural area to climb and a perfect setting for a slide. Trees, besides providing shade and climbing areas do also provide good strong branches and trunks to support further structures.

Walls provide places to sit on, to walk on, to jump off.

Grass and soil cushions falls.

The playground in front of the school is a large rectangular area 153' x 270' with a number of trees on three sides of the ground. It has a large centre areas that is open with no grass growing.

The groups of children on the playground range from 2 to 3 year olds to older teenagers. The younger children (few in number) accompany their brothers and sisters while they play various games. The older children come mostly to play cricket and a game can be seen at most times. The number of boys playing vary according to the time of day but there are no less than 15-20 children using the space even when school is on to more than a few hundred, late in the day and before and after school sessions. Older boys from the community are using the large centre space and two side areas for cricket games or practice. It was evident that the centre area was clearly staked out for cricket and therefore would remain open space.

The corners, especially the shady areas with large trees providing structural support systems was ideal for all the climbing structures. Again these were farther from the school office and building and would not lead to any disturbance.

An interconnected design developed in this area. Since our chief junk materials were old tyres (not so strong at that) and the minimum of hardware with low technical

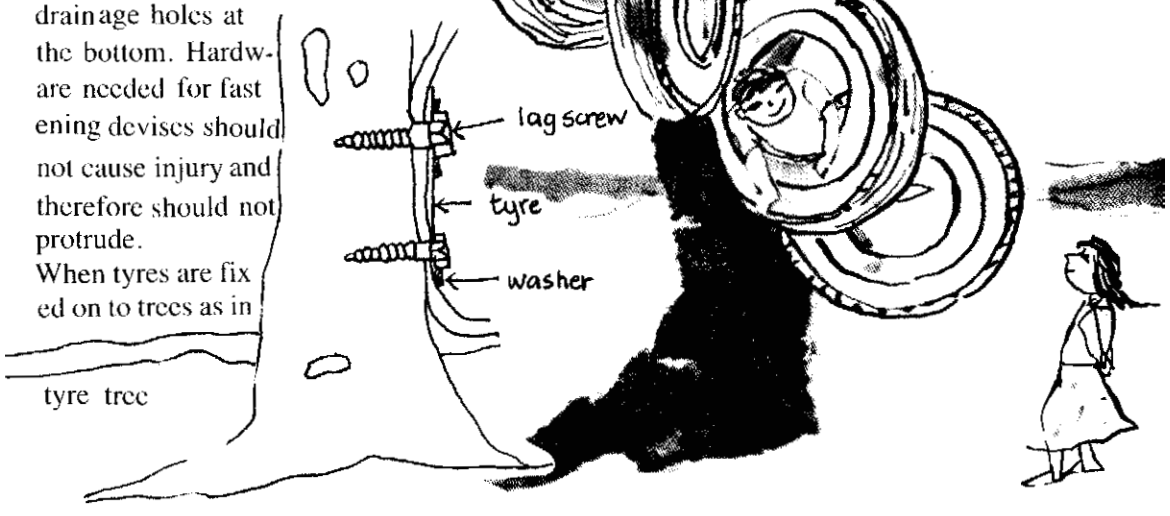
skills of older children in the community, the design developed as

Climbing structures encourage the usage of large arm, leg and back muscles and offer different levels of challenge, varying heights and platforms develop spatial awareness. These should provide graded difficulties of access and the assurance of a safe way down.

Multipurpose interconnected structures in wood, with platforms at different levels and various access points and modes make exciting climbing equipment. Since our basic junk material was chiefly tyres and natural supports of trees only the hardware consisting of screws and washers and bolts were chiefly needed. Tyres are difficult to cut through, fixing holes will need to be cut with a sharp lino knife, an electric drill, or a tank cutter; then bolted through.

All tyres exposed to the sky need drainage holes at the bottom. Hardware needed for fastening devises should not cause injury and therefore should not protrude.

When tyres are fixed on to trees as in




lag screws and washers are used as fasteners

lag screw ⅜" x 3"
washers ⅜" x 2"

Flexible climbers like the tyre jumper, tyre mountain balance beam, rope walks provide balance activities. These are inter linked with other play areas. Balance activities are hardly 2' from the ground thus ensuring safety.

Rope has been an important element in most early efforts. It is relatively inexpensive and flexible. It is also easy to fix and provides many variations. The Tarzan swing, the large tyre swing for a number of children to swing together, the rope bridge between two trees were throughly enjoyed but needed some supervision and did not last long. Low durability of ropes whether cotton or a mix of nylon fibre, on playgrounds with a large number of children is most likely. We replaced rope in many


places with chain or cable. Rope or cargo-net is still an attractive material for play settings provided it does not suffer too much stress.

Swings are the most popular items and yet the most difficult to maintain especially where there are many children. Swings require a set back area so as not to be a battering ram. They also need clear space on all sides so as not to hit any hard surface. A minimum setback requirement is two times the height of the swing.

The rope and tyre swings especially the largetyre swings provided a great deal of fun but ropes frayed, tyres sagged, much improvisation occured. Children would twist knot, tie reinforcements and yet would climb on 8-10 at a time to test its strength.

Free standing swing ropes like the Tarzan swing need supervision. Swings can take a variety of forms, the method of suspension, the bearing utilised and the support beams and chains would decide its strength.

As alternatives increased children spread over and found their own levels.

Two steel poles had been acquired — these led to a 2 pole slide fixed to a tree — the tree facilitated climbing up on branches and the slanting poles helped children come sliding down....

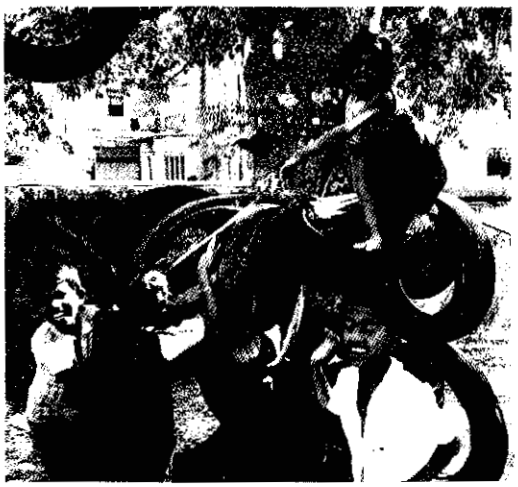
Slide height decisions depend on factors like distance of fall surface resistence. Usually a 64" height is prescribed for a slide. There can be various types of slides like the chute slide, wave slide, wide paired slides, slides on natural slopes with access steps facing the same direction etc. Accessibility and exit need careful consideration.

Creating different types of slides in play settings would provide more challenges at different levels. A safer challenge for the younger children is envisaged in building a small slide on a mound, closer to the sand area. The steps will be along the slide. We are yet building our mound.

While the front area i.e. the Playground structures grew, constant use had reduced littering. We also moved stones so that none of us would get hurt climbing, jumping, or even falling.

The impact of a fall is far lesser when the ground is covered with grass, sand, soft soil, bark, wood-chips, to a one foot depth. Grass, soft soil and sand are natural materials and yet soil would need to be turned often to retain air and maintain absorbency.

The spaces where children had played marbles and hopscotch near the building were still open and none of the groups had yet had to forego their favourite playspaces. Since marbles, balls and skipping ropes seemed to be the prized materials, it seemed reasonable to provide some more for each of the four sections within the school.



**The Backyard**

The most junked out area was the back-yard overgrown with nettles and full of garbage that was thrown over the wall. School had totally given up on the state of their area and prohibited access due to the fear of snakes.

**Litter and Debris:** Uncleared, overgrown spaces, often collect elements that could be hazardous to children and the concern of the teachers to treat the space as 'inaccessible ground' was comprehensible. It was also reasonable to assume that litter attracted more garbage and yet 'forbidden areas' close to childrens spaces must be cleared and made non-hazardous.

Clearing was a major task. Initially most of the school was reluctant, meetings and plans for a back-garden began. Very slowly and with minimul tools, the work began. Nettles were cut, burnt. Clearing requires some tools to dig and carry stones and rubble — hand forks, hoes, shovels, spades were at a minimum. Old buckets, and tarpaulins and pans served to carry the stones and slowly the litter that used to be thrown over the wall reduced, children's plots were cleared. 8-9 year olds did a wonderful job of lifting and throwing stones and at last the fences were made for 4 plots, one for each school within the Unnatnagar school complex.

A water pipe line was obtained and with grave omissions and neglect at times,we are slowly learning to care for our gardens.

The topsoil was thin. We adopted a DIG-GING policy since bringing in loads of topsoil and compost was not possible. Sandy and stony soil needed removal of large surface stones. We need humous -making materials, manure and compost and leaf mould — more growing.

Knowing our soil has been a fairly long process. The provision for water and more air due to digging has slowly brought life to hardier plants. The first rains have left the ground with humous but much more planting and digging and manure would be required.

Working on the ground has taught us:

— The lesser the stones per sq. ft. the better our plants grow.
— Moisture is essential and need to be retained. Drainage will improve soil.
— Since we do not wish to walk on our seedlings paths and paved stones would provide access.
— Weeds grow practically overnight.

We learnt to make compost heaps with leaves and organic and inorganic materials like branches, leaves animal bones and potato peels etc.

The soil layer over rocky ground is yet thin but over the last few months teachers and children are concerned. The Garden Project is slowly developing links with curricula — naming, recording, nurturing techniques are growing. Trees, shrubs, seeds, corn, cuttings.

From the Gardening Project Journal of the Hindi School at Unnat Nagar, Principal Singh's remarks "I started our Gardening Project with making teachers Dasharath and Rai responsible for the work. They would take a group for gardening and work, and relate the days efforts to me. The land was in extremely poor condition. IV Std children (9-10 year olds) worked very hard at clearing the land — today the garden is attractive to all.

We dug, watered, made fences, planted shrubs, vegetables, and flowering plants, we kept up a constant caring. Children loved these chores. I am very happy to see the children's work. Their daily work was somewhat like this. It involved clearing nettles and weeds, removing stones, surfacing, making beds, and fences and water trenches, watering, planting, providing manure and water.

**An Evaluation**

Children's work in the garden sharpened their observation — they are very happy and enthusiastic working out there. This condition is very essential for emotions for learning and for physical development.

— the children's chatter and happiness seems that this is very pleasant work.
— the physical labour I hope will increase their physical resources.
— a self confidence is growing as they plant and manage the beds.
— the children love their plants and are nurturing them.
— I imagine this would help them look after their environments.

Children unknowingly are getting familiar with plants and the conditions of their growth. Seeds, shoots, buds, roots, their taking nourishment from soil; water, light, manure and their interactions are incidentally understood.

They are doing things without much guidance and learning too.

I think the enthusiasm will spread to the homes and the parents are going to be proud of my children" (Mr. Singh 10.1.1989)

Mr. Singh's Hindi School which forms one of four schools within the Unnatnagar school has only four classes. The oldest are the 9 year olds in Std. IV and the shared

enthusiasm and effort of all the schools have turned a very bleak backyard into a garden strengthening our belief that plants and children need to grow together.

The Garden Project in various schools not only connected the science curriculum but poetry and literature and art. An introduction to the use of various leaves and their therapeutic values which form a rich source of folk medicine in the Indian culture also began to be shared. Certain flowers and leaves are traditionally preferred for festivities and religious ceremonies. Usage added another dimension to the Project.

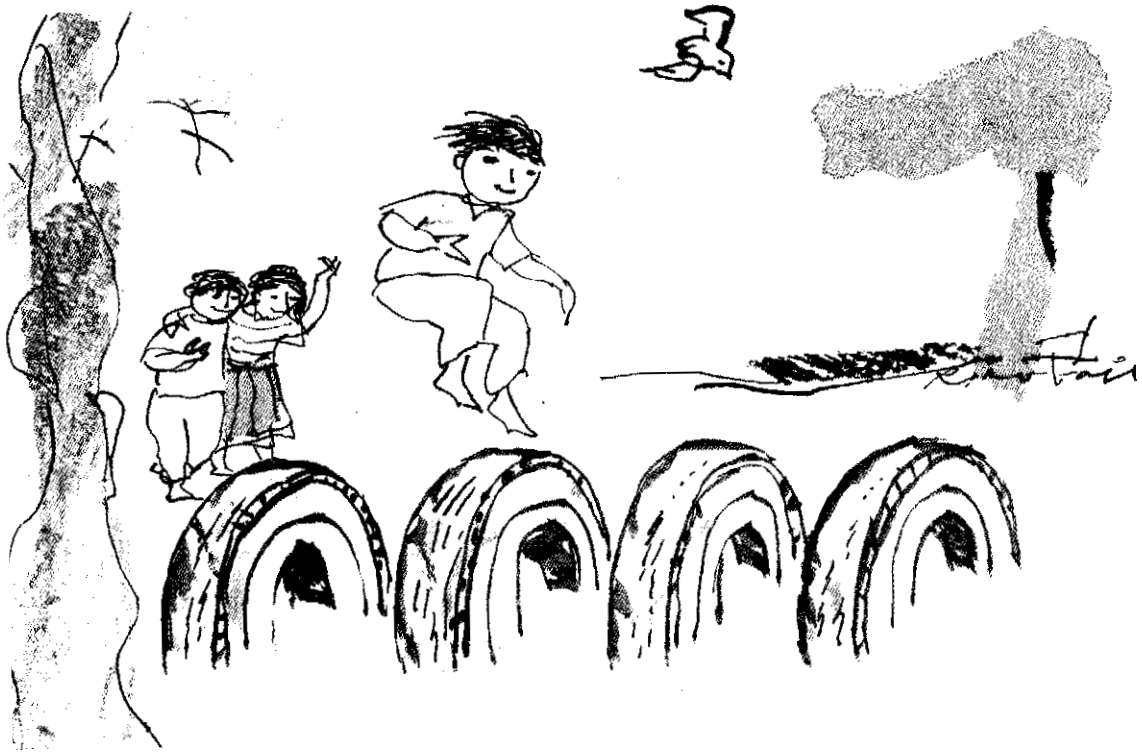
Similar patterns were followed by other schools. There is a greater sense of pride in the back garden now and extentions are being planned by the teachers.

The side areas where new trees are planted will provide shade and coolness, designs for more outdoor utilization closer to the school building are planned. These would provide the younger children access to outdoor activities like playing in the sand, jumping climbing, balancing, a table or two under the trees for art and craft and other activities. Some plants and shrubs in the area would also provide places for hide and seek, to see shoots and flowers providing sensory variety in texture, colour and smell.

This should invite the younger children to more utilization of the outside spaces creating a connected space between indoors and outdoors.

A cable spool table, tyre seats, a log enclosed sand pit and a box ladder from the trees are some of the constructions for which materials are being collected.

A very special consideration for shade, and for size and scale is to be maintained — as this area is directly connected to the youngest people's classroom. It is essential to feel out in the open to see the sky and the light and shade and yet feel safe enough to watch the larger playground and games; to play and rest. Social density or too many children also necessitates that the classroom spill over into the adjacent open space should be comfortable during most parts of the day. We also hope that the sunshine, colour, light and shade will soon permeate and affect the classrooms as connections grow between outdoors and indoors, to merge into a totality. Aesthetics and beauty need to permeate spaces that are specially for children. The interconnected outdoor space will provide textural quality, a diffusion of noise, and a visual invitation to use the space — for children need some freedom to move around.



The provision of sand is reassuring to sit on, fall on. It moves and lends itself to all kinds of action. It can be poured, to dig into, used to bury, to make patterns, to throw and scatter, to build and shape and much more.

Sand with a few props and loose materials like pipes, utensils, funnels, bamboo pieces, boxes, coconut shell; material provision should provide for much playing.

**INDOOR SPACES & other areas like courtyards, terraces, corridors**

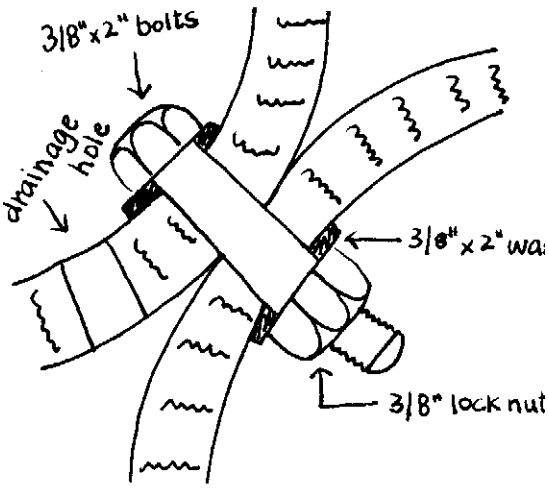
Spaces serve people and people change places to suit their needs. If classrooms are crowded — there may be more creative uses of other spaces — some built in flexibility increases children's competence with a variety of things to do in a variety of places.

Can activity settings be created in corners, niches, under stairs, in corridors, on the wall spaces at various levels?

Large amounts of spaces are neglected spaces, even within crowded buildings. There are certain multi-purpose spaces whose limits can be pushed further with a little more use eg. a hall, a yard. One such area was the central courtyard of Unnat Nagar school. This large central area had corridors and classrooms around it on all four sides and is a place of high access and visibility. Since the ground is paved the motor experiences would have to be non-explosive. A common space is sometimes difficult to share and therefore children seemed to be more off limits in the area at most times. A complete lack of shade and starkness might have something to do with it.

Loose rebounders like tyre cubes, tyre rollers and loose tyres seemed to add a fair amount of challenges. These formed good alternatives for ball throwing, which was generally not approved since the balls could sail into the corridors and classrooms.

All the materials — the cubes, rollers, and even the tyre car could be stacked away to leave the central courtyard empty for flag saluting and such other times.




'Lines on the ground' are a major source of play provision and still leaves the areas clear. We have built in a number of variations in Street Games & Traditional Games for Early Learners* like Hopscotch with numbers, letter and vowel connections to build words.

The letter and word making connected with little blackboards painted on the wall have led to a lot of playing and reading.

The Marathi School No. 2 Principal Mrs. Prabhu says -

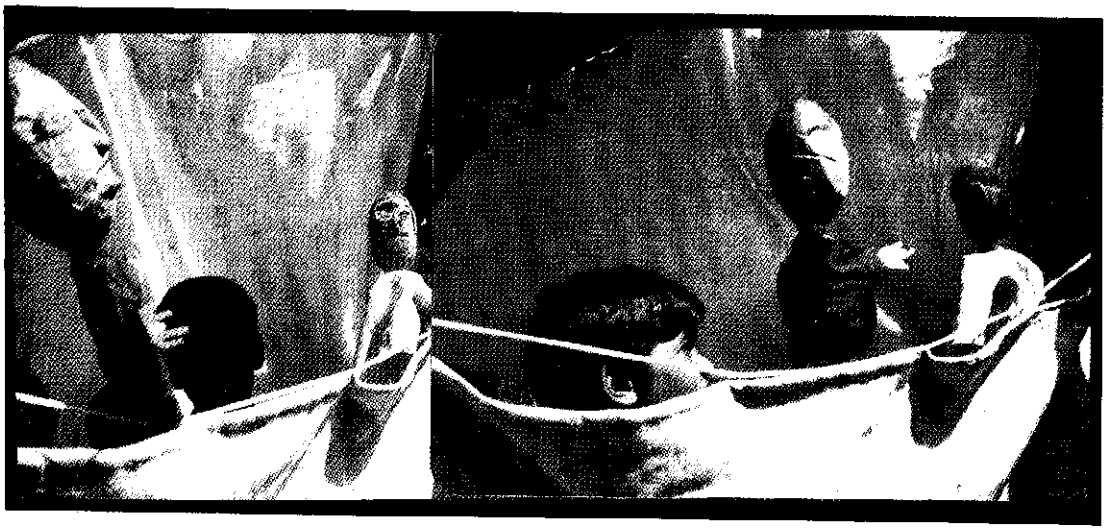
"New children entering school get bored sitting too long therefore learning letters, vowels and numbers as they jump and hop and play, makes it all 'play'. It helps them think about words rather than being told about them and since some contribute, others feel they must make new words too. Mistakes are corrected together clearly and therefore do not recur. The same applies to playing with number."

Mrs. Koria, a teacher, finds these games most suitable for the younger ages "but since everybody wants to play, more time is needed. Increased levels of difficulty could be adopted for older classes also."

The terraces of the Gujarati school find these games great favourites. Since the letters of the language are different they are happy to have their own area. Teachers are involved in creating new variations.

The courtyard being a central area it seemed ideal for Theatre, and puppets. A 'goal' made with iron pipes was converted into a puppet theatre. Curtains are laced on and off when needed and classes come and sit around whenever there is a show.

* *Aruna Thakkar 'Street Games and Traditional Games for Early Learners'. (1987)*



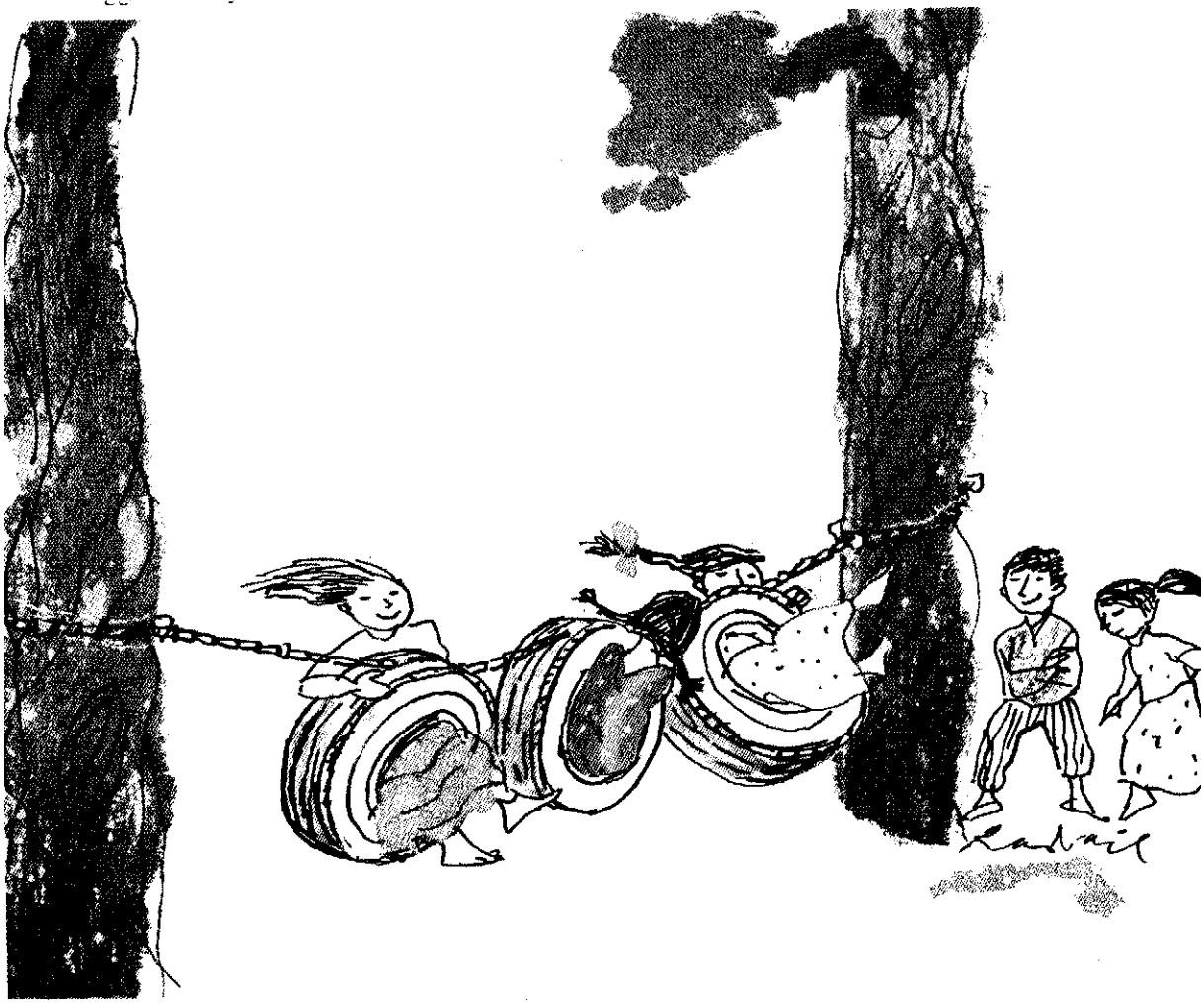
The teachers have taken the challenge of 'history' being translated into Theatre scripts. 4th Std. history revolves around Shivaji the hero dearest to all Maharashtrian hearts. Bombay has held a strong position in Marathi Theatre — and the teachers and students are confident of producing a repertoire of historical plays — which could be enacted in the courtyard for all to see.

Theatre arts as a means of imaginative play have strong roots in the culture of the community. Mythology and religion are an inherent part of daily lives. Festivals, events, temple visits, devotional songs are joyous and it seems natural that these extend to schools. Traditions in types of animation like the Rajasthani puppets, leather puppets, shadow shows, mask dances, street theatre, performing bands, all suggest a very rich source to draw upon.

## MATERIALS

Materials to react with, to construct, fix, move around and work within various ways. Materials clarifying experiences from the physical environment, like trees, flowers, fruits, herbs, wood, bark, stone, water sand. Constructed elements that enhance understandings of natural forces like up down, fast slow, heavy light - - as would swings and slides and climbers and balancers. Loose materials that would enrich play provision due to their diversity and movability.

All playground construction bring the controversy of wood vs metal but since we think of very low cost and junk construction, our attempts are to be geared towards looking out for freely given or cheaply bought materials from the local authorities and community. A self-help approach for



the schools, within the community, is sought to enable the teachers and children to manage creatively and constructively.

Knowing the neighbourhood and the community helps identify materials that could be obtained. Packing cases, old crates for tree houses; empty cable spools from the local authorities for climbers; chipped cement pipes for chutes and slides; telegraph poles for supports to structures, barrels for swings; etc. are possible to obtain at times. Tyres, cartons, bamboo, ladders, rope, left overs of nearby construction like cement/sand/brick/pebbles, logs of fallen trees — plants and bits of wood from shops and saw mills, are some of the basic materials that can provide immense potential. Listing all loose materials would form a variable scrap shop — but the very ethics of creative utilization and safe improvisation assures us that playwork does not involve large outlays and therefore has a great deal of scope in play provision for children — as long as a constant eye is kept on safety and maintenance.

Loose materials can be moved with a fair amount of ease and therefore could have many alternate uses. It is the thoughtful provision of these that would create an exciting and flexible environment within the play spaces. Since the materials are removable, they are more open to loss, damage and theft. Storage facilities would have to be worked out. A certain system or compartmentalization within the store is essential for ready access. It is the combination: the total design of playspaces, with imaginative provision of loose materials, and the presence of the playleader as a catalyst that provides the play environment for the children.

To categorize and list a few of the loose materials.

**Tools & containers:** For gardening like spades and rakes sand and water and woodwork and saws and hammers and nails, water hoses, buckets, pots and other containers, sieves, funnels, plastic bottles, etc. More interesting material can get added as projects develop eg. bellows, windmills, weather-vanes, hour-glasses, magnets.

**Art & Craft:** Besides all kinds of paper paint glue, crayons, a wide variety of junk from cardboards, boxes, foam, wood, bottletops, rolls, jars, lids, wire, pipe cleaners, string ribbon, cloth, wool, gift-wraps, are useful

Junk for construction, for collage, masks, dolls puppets, keeping animals, simple construction and all forms of craft and art provide a very large choice. It is the judicial provision and layout of materials rather than just the variety that would promote creative play.

A certain provision of materials in conjunction with site design will maximize utilization. e.g. ground games, like hops-cotch, nine pins, checkers, open area use for ball games, rope games.

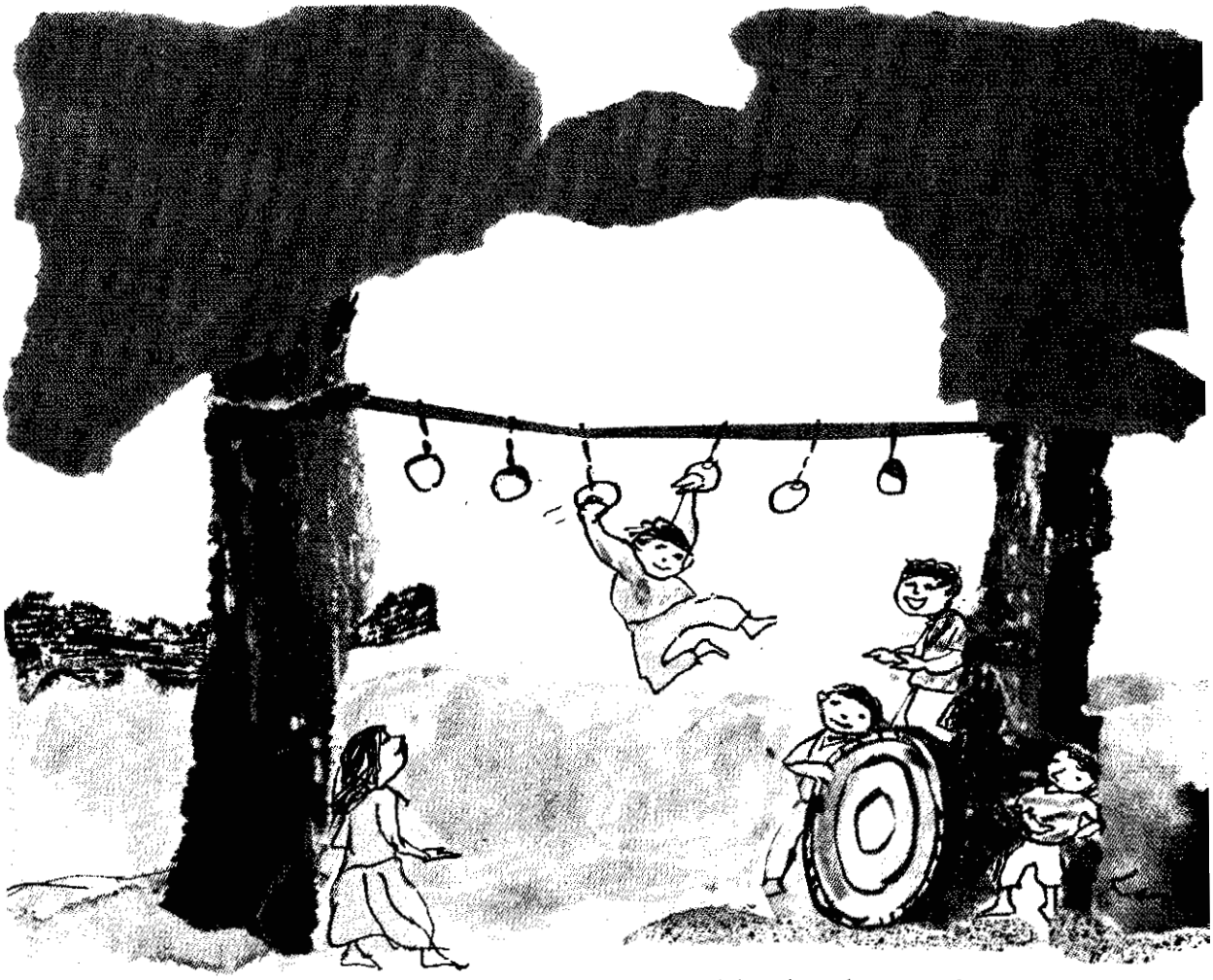
Children bring many perspectives to bear on materials made available to them. For the infants and toddlers materials could be geared to provide various sensory inputs and experience. They will also need lighter, safer, more rounded, materials but exploration manipulation, holding moving stacking experiences should be possible.

Enhancement props to most play areas need a little thought on the part of the provider for small portable kits that provide various types of play extention activities. These could be prepared e.g. for the sand play area a 'city kit' which might have smaller units for streets, houses, cars, tunnels, bridges, etc.

Simple **props** like a blanket, ladder, cartons boxes, planks, milk bottle carriers, help create personal spaces like 'houses' 'ships'.

**Animals** and their care could be very satisfying but these need a separate area and constant attention. Responsibility for the care of animals will have to be shared and supervised carefully.

**Art** forms, sculptures, murals, wall painting crafts like rag-weaving, skills like basket weaving, garland-making printing all form exciting areas and need some provision. **Games**, of every sort, including board games, card games, marble games, dice games will need small stocks of materials.



**Major activities and events** like construction, making fires, cook-outs, celebrations of festivals, setting up for a show, planting an area, etc. provide major focal points for interesting play activities; moreover deadlines need to be met, responsibilities taken and shared, plans to be drawn out and discussed and work to be done.

The qualities of the **Playleader,** the loose materials made available and play provision on the playground all combine to provide a supportive environment for children's play activities. With the involvement of parents and the community together could work towards providing a variable and stimulating environment geared to the needs of the children.

Climbing structures, ladders, steps, rope, poles, bars, balancing beams, bridges, trampolines, sea-saws, jumping, swinging, sliding, rocking horses, roundabout etc., **elements could be interconnected** providing alternatives and interest to further experimentation and exploration.

**Choice of Materials:** The use of wood, steel, concrete, pipes, and other junk materials. This will depend on a number of factors like expectation of durability, cost of construction, possibilities of supervision and maintenance, age of children using the area, etc.

**Safety** precautions, regular checks and maintenance, hazard prevention, rust corrosion, and decay will have to be considered. Uncluttered design with a few elements would perhaps provide adequate space for movement rather than overcrowded inflexible structures with limited choice.

Junk materials like tyres, rope, barrels are useful in providing a wide provision. These can be acquired from the community. Acquiring and constructing become relevant activities in themselves.

**Management** of the play area and maintenance and innovation would require a continuous involvement.

# PLAYLEADERS

The people who help create caring places, learning places for children, the people who will be there to support and assist and extend play opportunities are the most important resource.

Where children's activities occur especially construction as on adventure playgrounds, junk playgrounds, gardening, games, art, music, theatre, projects, cook-outs, writing, reading, sports, gymnastics, occur, there may be people who have planned and provided to make these happen.

Playleaders and their role is an increasingly recognized need for it is their involvement skills and care which makes children's environments work. Youth Centres, leisure centres and all associations and organizations for the older groups also need sensitive leaders. To work with children and youth democratically, without making the child's play environment a repressive, and highly organized one needs certain understandings and attitudes. The greater the skills in the practical aspects of working with ones hands, to make, to repair, to adjust to create alternatives; to have diverse skills like weaving, drawing, modelling, to

know and understand growing and nurture in nature, amongst animals and children are some useful aspects. Training of playleaders would also need some theoretical aspects of educational psychology, mental health and hygiene and to know the special needs of the children. The most relevant factor seems to be that the leader should be able to promote the interests of the children's playspaces within the community and social institutions in the neighbourhood. The playleader could provide for change, stimulation alternatives, would remove hazards to develop new ideas, for children's spaces will need to grow and change in keeping with their interests and needs.

A Playleader would not only build on his own abilities and providing abilities and skills in providing a stimulating environment but include community resources, physical and cultural. Innovation and a strong awareness of events, happenings, new topics of interest, and changes in the immediate environment would help playleaders provide more play schemes play structures, materials, art craft, murals, theatre, music, games, etc.

The time of year, weather and seasons, events on the calendar, school time, holiday time, the needs and interests of the children in the group and their curriculum in school, the potential of neighbourhoods and people in the community would definitely affect planning and resources. Though the playleader's authority is to be recognized, children must have a fair amount of choice and responsibility in planning and extending their play provision. The spontaneous nature of play must be recognized. Too much injuction and supervision would lead to boredom and discontent and negative behaviours. The social environment of a play area is largely dependent on the attitudes of the playleaders. Since children's learning is based on their play activities and provision the playleaders are the most successful teachers working with children.

**An example: Unnat Nagar Municipal Primary School, Goregaon**

The year has been a time of knowing that changes do happen — when physical environments are acted upon, they in turn change the social climate. The extremely poor conditions of the backyard, the glass debris and garbage and an overgrowth of stinging nettles was daunting to say the least. The playground was mostly used by outside youth and vandalism was rampant. Under the circumstances, initial expenctations and involvement were limited as play structures developed, and children played happily sitting amongst various levels on the trees, swinging from tyres, taking off the cable ride, pride and enthusiasm grew and teachers were planning, leading garden projects, maintaining journals, creating poetry, recording with leaf rubbings and general information about herbs, vegetables and plants acquiring shurbs to plant. Teachers learnt new games from the provision of ground lines for Street Games and were soon devising new ones. Loose materials like skipping ropes, tops, marbles, balls were accepted and utilized. Teachers viewed slides, held meetings and discussions, wrote plays and made puppets, enjoyed having volunteers and visitors to come and help at art and craft like the 'Ganesh' making by a group of visiting social workers from Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Jimi's expertise with nuts and bolts and cables was highly appreciated as was his capacity to work at all the difficult tasks like clearing nettles and stones.

People working with children react spontaneously to helping create a stimulating environment.

A small beginning would go a long way to create play provision, construction and activity, satisfactions and competencies as was proved by the larger involvement of the Education department in training and expansion.

the Education Department in training and expansion.

Social workers within institutions working with children have also begun training and will lead play provision in remand homes, orphanages, child guidance clinics, daycare centres and other children's institutions.

Teaching about clean environments, about conservation and creative utilization of spaces, of natural environments, within the grayness and congestion of urban living and economic stress cannot be done through 'words' alone it is by creating strengths in people to make their own provision for a stimulating environment that learning will gain a social relevance.